

In short, it helps us to imagine blackness as a resource for life and life giving. Our conversation with Dr. Hartman today concerns this dilemma. How to reimagine blackness and the possibilities of such re-imagining.

casually, oh, you're trying to invent a new mode of historiography, I get it. And so having someone who understands what you're trying to do and trust that is very important.

Actually, Norton will reissue *Scenes of Subjection* this year. And with Oxford, there were a number of mistakes that have been introduced in the book and its production and for me as the author, even if they're small, there's no such thing as a small mistake to an author of a book. So just having that chance to correct that and also just you know in terms of pricing, I mean Norton isn't a big trade press. In fact it's worker owned and it's considered like a crossover press. They do a lot of serious academic work, Eric Foner, I'm forgetting the name that- the author of the Hemings book, what's such historian's name, she's not coming to my mind. She's at Harvard, she wrote a great book about Sally...

I mean, all of these are like Norton authors, so they are serious scholars, there's novelists. And for me it's both about a commitment to getting books reviewed and a commitment to having them distributed. And right now my Oxford paperback, it's almost \$40. The Norton paperback will be \$20. With *Scenes* to save time and space it feels like a really tense experience because there's almost like 100- there's almost 1 1/2 pages of text on each page, so for me there's just more attention to the book and its production.

I mean, there was never an ebook of *Scenes*, right? Those kinds of things matter in terms of the distribution of books, and so much of what we do as teachers and professors is a way of keeping books alive. I think that anything we can do as writers to just have more people have access to a book at a lower cost, that's a value for me. After writing *Scenes*, which was a book from my heart, just as everything is, but there were people I met because I had my Fulbright year after writing *Scenes*, and there were people I met in Ghana who were reading the book or trying to read it and they said there's so much important stuff in here I can tell, but it is so difficult, it's so difficult. And I thought, wow, these are people I really respect. These are people I'm engaged with. I want them to be able to enter the work. So I feel with *Lose You Mother* and *Wayward Lives*, the same theoretical apparatus is at work, but the reader doesn't need that apparatus to enter the text. If you have it, good, there will be things that are like present for you, there will be ques, there will be references, but to actually have a full reading experience of the book that isn't required.

And it's important to me to have more black readers, more readers who are not traditional intellectuals. The porter of my building in New York has read my book. My electrician and his mother and his sister, they've read my book and I lov1 0 0 IMirL12 0 TJETQ.00000912 0 612 792 re.€ wr*ñBT/F1 10.98 Tf1 0 0 1 294.92 482.62 T

wealthier families that “adopt” them, so many of the ideas that you bring up in terms of the duality of intimacy and domination and things of that sort are so relevant, but we'll get to that later on.

My question to you is I want to start with the shorter piece that you have, *Intimate History, Radical Narrative*.” And essentially you take us on a journey inside of your studio and I really enjoy this piece, you describe it as a fugitive text of the wayward, but I wanted you to give us more detail about how we make sense of it from a methodological standpoint. Is it fiction? Is it nonfiction? Is it a mix of it all? You describe it as

York who took the same journey. So that's the way

way that there's a recognition of humanity, that recognition imposes another kind of violence. And for me, that was the theoretical intervention at the macro level, right? So that, then, is this discourse ultimately one that it's going to enable us? I mean other 18th century historians have spoken about the relationship between the emergence of humanitarian discourse and capitalism and commerce and the slave trade, so that there's an entanglement, which means that there is an underside, and I think that that's what we see, because I think, traditionally, oh the violence of slavery is being objectified, you know, there's a theorist, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, and she has this term thinking about black existence as plasticity. So it's not simply that we are negated as human, we're both recognized as humans and negated as humans, but that articulation of what the human is, is so restrictive, is itself a mode of violence.

I mean you opened up making an aside to Sarah Haley and I wanna bring her back in because I think that we also had this vision of writing as this solitary enterprise, and I really feel like I've never written a single author anything. When I am on the page, there's so many people who are always with me on that page. I say in the piece, when Sarah helped me- my mother had just died. I don't know that I actually had the energy or the focus to do that work of doing all the notes. So that was just such a great gift and I think that that's also a part of this, ideally, this collective project that we're involved in, that there's a community that has enabled us to do the work, and a community will continue to enable us to do that collectively.

And I think about that experience versus someone like Sylvia Wynter who wrote a brilliant tone, *Black Metamorphosis*, that has been unpublished for like 30 or 40 years because the footnotes weren't completed and are now just being completed so it can be published. So that gift meant a great deal to me.

00:23:23 Brittany

Thank you so much. I love what you said about not writing alone, like that was... [laughing].

00:23:33 Elizabeth

I think I have the next question. So in the tradition of critical race theory- and I'm going to use that term even though we are in Florida- [laughing] you persuasively expose some of the nefarious ways that racist lawmakers anticipated and really deliberately constructed a legal system based on white supremacist and patriarchal ideas right, involving cultivated stereotypes, custom sentiments, and in many ways that connects to a number of themes that I write about in my own work that I connect to what I call this affective architecture of domination.

So what's interesting about your work is that you leverage court cases in ways that show that rape, for example, was really a property crime when it was a crime at all. And black women really had no recourse. You mentioned 75 cases I believe. Are there conditions in cases where a different outcome actually happened as it relates to the readings of black women's bodies? So like I guess what I'm asking is how many cases are in the historiography where claims of rapes were made and actually prosecuted with a guilty verdict. Did that ever happen? Did anything close to that happen? And this is me wanting to see perhaps some of the gray area that existed, if any, just to hear more about the texture of these cases.

00:24:58 Saidiya

Yes, and you know what? When I was referring to the 75 cases, I was thinking of actually, *Wayward Lives* in terms of the cases from the reformatory and the prison. But in Donnan's volume of slave cases and also Adrienne Davis, do you know her work? She's a legal theorist. She's at WashU who also does work on issues of slavery, sexuality and the family- because it had no standing in law, like how do you actually- it has no standing, so there can't be a case for something that's nonexistent, and I think that that's what was interesting about the strategy around Silla, right? Like trying to introduce rape as the cause for then her own act of self defense and it's like but no what are you talking about? It's as if making excess profit under capitalism were a crime. It's not. So even as we understand the violation it is, even as we understand how it makes human life unlivable, that's not a crime. But in terms of gray areas, I think I can talk about that in relation to *Wayward Lives*, in that I wrote a book about wayward lives. I didn't write a book about the lives of young black women in the reformatory, because there were a range of young black women in the reformatory, right? And not all of the young black women in the reformatory were wayward. There were virginal young women who were engaged to be married who had sex with their fiance who got pregnant who were abandoned. For me that didn't qualify for being actually wayward. There were people who weren't wayward.

So it's not like my project was to kind of paint every case I've read with that brush, but to respect that difference because I think a question that- Annette Gordon Reed was the historian I was thinking of- I think a question is am I imposing a kind of a contemporary set of values on those I'm writing about in the past. And the answer is no, and that's why this is the set of lives that I described. Does that describe the lives of all young black women? No. Does it even describe the lives of the majority of black women? No right? Because there's always cases that can challenge- I mean, I think if I was doing a history of the reformatory or prison it would be different. But I was writing about these kind of dangerous experiments and freedoms. These attempts at sexual transgression and freedom. So a particular set of people were central to that.

00:28:29 Elizabeth

Thank you for that and I think that Dr. Lemons is up next.

00:28:37 Gary Lemons

Dr. Hartman, I am so very inspired by your work. My name is Gary Lemons and I'm a full professor in the English department at the University of South Florida and my pedagogical focus is black feminist and womanist literary studies.

Just had a book that came out called *Liberation for the Oppressed: Community Healing Through Activist Transformation*, which really relates so much to the course and the progression and the radicalism and revolutionary aspects of your writing. Now I, like Brittany, wrote down my question because it has a context and it follows with Dr. Elizabeth's point about critical race theory, particularly in the state of Florida. So I'll read the context and the question is in this.

In the state of Florida, the current governor has promoted and insisted upon passing legislation banning the teaching of critical race theory in schools. Considering the critical importance of your legal research focused on the history for African enslavement as the legal foundation of this nation's constitutional property rights of whites, particularly hetero white men and the black body, how would you defend the

necessity of teaching critical race theory in schools, not as a form of attack against white people, but as a liberating strategy of anti-racist alliance and racial healing?

00:30:20 Saidiya

So first I'm going to give you a very pessimistic answer. Okay, and you know one has to want to have the eradication of racism as a goal and one has to want to be healed, and I think at this moment in our national context, many people are devoted and are successfully committed to a racist order. They are actively committed to disenfranchising black voters. They have an agenda, so it's not that, oh, we can win those people over through an anti racist pedagogy. I mean, they're committed to something and what they're committed to is a white dominant social order and a white supremacist project. In a way it's paradoxical that you know, and just under 45, you know the return of all the kind of the Confederate flags, the regalia, fascist regalia, as a source of empowered white identity, why is it actually so threatening than to just deal with the formation of our national context, and that undeniably being based on racial slavery and settler colonialism? And so that's not about reaping disharmony, because it's just like the fact of the programs that the institutions of exploitation and the extraction and accumulation that were foundational to the emergence of the nation. So for me, it's about this authoritarianism and an incipient fascism in the US, because authoritarianism wants to repress discourse. And it's not like you or I made up the fact of European settlement in the Americas. I mean, there is a Trail of Tears, there is treaties, there's the whole apparatus of law that emerges in the 17th century to make this a slaveholding republic and to create the category of a white citizen. So partly it's an attempt to enable a supremacist project by denying people and particularly young people and students of the kind of knowledge that would enable them to have critical perspective on the US. And might be radically disenchanting, right? Might be radically disenchanting when we think about the systemic ways that black wealth has been extracted, right? So then, oh, if you would just understand that from the freedman's bank forward every- we're just talking about like black people's efforts to accumulate capital and when they do that successfully, even that comes under attack. I mean, we're in a capitalist nation, so what's so threatening about the specter of black capital? I think then these kind of myths of US democracy, upward mobility, the meritocracy, anyone can get ahead, that is thrown into crisis when we think about the structures that have actually made that impossible.

And I think that for white people thinking about the structural advantages that have enabled them to move ahead and to accumulate wealth and value and property, and this is not- and even if you're like, well, I wasn't here, I didn't own slaves- I mean, in the course of the pandemic there was a series of exposes about evaluations of property. What do you call it? The people who go to people homes and they evaluate the worth of their house. So homes that were in white neighborhoods but owned by black people, if the black owner was present, the value of the house would be devalued 2 and 3 hundred thousand dollars so the black owners would have their white neighbors stand in when the banking officials and others came to evaluate the value of their homes so its proper value could be ascribed to the home. So that's about the way in which- whether that's conscious or not- but the way racism is so built into these structures evaluation and without an understanding of the long history of exploitation, extraction, the destruction of black business zones, the collapse of black financial institutions with no intervention by the federal government, the predatory crisis of the 2008 subprime workers, all of these are like capitalist strategies that are totally entangled with racism. So if you can't talk about this history then you can never understand those things, and so then it's easier to say like, "Oh well, you know black people are responsible for their own condition. They don't work hard and save like other people. They

don't do this. They don't do that. They don't do this." And I think that knowledge is power. And to give young people a tool for critical thinking, that's potentially a tool for a radical social transformation. That's the reason why they're doing this. I mean, 45 and the far right, they're not afraid of racial antagonism. In fact, they're cultivating it. What they're afraid of, is the cultivation of critical thinking that threatens to undo this project.

00:36:52 Gary

Dr. Hartman you remind me so much of Angela Davis. Continue be the radical sister that you are. Thank you so much.

00:36:59 Saidiya

Thank you, thank you very much and I hope everyone sends me their books after this is over 'cause people keep on mentioning things that they've written. So please please do send them to me.

00:37:14 Cynthia

OK, I guess my question is next. Can you hear me? I want to go back and pull through a thread from earlier and then kind of build on it. You were talking about sitting down, you're never writing alone, you're living with Cilya, you're living with the women that you wrote about and I think that's what brought me to my current project. I'm a minister's wife, not a Christian. I always tell people we're not Christian. Unitarian far left go farther left that you can go in white denominations. And so I've been really feeling connected to these women I'm trying to write about 'cause they were ministers wives and bishops wives, and they're trying to carve out some space for cultural authority in a very patriarchal denomination, African Methodist Episcopal. And I also been leading racial justice at my church for a long time, and it's frustrating. I'm frustrated with white people right now, but I wanted to ask about the church women that you write about, because you write about women who are also churchgoing and you talk about the Bibles in their rooms and were you surprised that there was this kind of waywardness balancing out their religious faith? Or did that not come as a surprise to you?

00:38:40 Saidiya

You know what? I think it didn't come as a surprise to me and I think I wanted to not present a certain picture of like the "church lady" right? And there's a great collection of short stories called the secret lives of like church women or something like which is great. It's like you know what? People go to church are as complex as people who don't go to church and I think that for me, what was really important was the fact of their faith in a way underscored their non conventionality and radicalism. Because what does it mean to be like a churchgoing woman who's a total respectable member of your congregation, but you do not believe in marriage, and you are not going to get married again, like do you know what I'm saying? Like in a way that's a really interesting position to maintain. If you issue the church OK, you can do what you want and I think that thinking about that nuanced web of values was important to display because I think that for the state authorities- some of the women I [inaudible] oh this person is like, you know, amoral because they're living out of wedlock with the man and I'm like no, this is like the matron of the church who's doing all this good work, who owns her own business, I mean, this is someone who's actually a respectable upstanding figure in our community and is also involved in the lifestyle that's like a variant on what is considered the heteronormative Victorian paradigm. So I think that that was, you know, important.

A friend of mine who is a filmmaker, Arthur Jafa, has this thing because he made this great film on black religious experience. And people were like, well do you believe in God? And he said, "I believe in black belief" and I want to say just like the power of black belief and how critical that power is to struggles for freedom, whether you're like in the church or not, what is it, I think that particularly for 18th and 19th century enslaved Africans that was so important in imagining a justice that was so much greater than the power of white men or Europeans. Like no no, your justice is small in compared to this and you may not give me justice, but you know what? There is divine retribution, so I think belief and faith are really complex matters. So I feel like I just like touched upon that I think that. You know there's historians like Ula Taylor who wrote this book on Women and the Nation of Islam, which is really kind of a similar project because it's like how is it that women exist within these really patriarchal structures, but still, they're exercising leadership.

sterilization has been such a huge issue. And also Miriam Makeba actually framed as a reproductive justice issue, the murder of our children, right? That's also in the frame, like being able to kind of sustain and preserve the life of our children. And that framing of reproductive justice has the potential to undo these structures because it's not only about individual rights to choose, but it's about reproductive justice projects that are fundamentally at odds with the order that makes certain lives disposable, vulnerable to more violence, without access to healthcare. Again, black maternal mortality is also a reproductive justice issue. I'm thinking of Dorothy Roberts, you know, killing the black body. I mean, I feel like the way black feminists have taken up reproductive justice is been thinking about all of these state institutions and practices which make life for us impossible.

So I think you're right to point out that disparity. What's also really interesting about married women's property rights is a number of historians, white women historians, black women historians,

00:49:40 Saidiya

Right

00:49:40 Jordan D.

I'm also thinking about some of the ways that the institution participates in the very things that we are trying to abolish, right? And that part of our work is caught up in the very systems that we intend to abolish. So what I really mean when I say we're without a prayer is I'm really curious about your perspective on this double bind of what I think is black studies of this double binding condition of black studies. Is that the work that you have achieved is theoretical genius and I don't think anyone could take that away from you. I think it is a work that will exist forever. For as long as there are people who can read, your work will exist forever. But the problem is that the very condition of that work is the precariousness of our situation is how awful things are, and I think what our discussion is made very legible is the ways in which all these historical conditions are still our same conditions, their structures that changed, but their functions are exactly the same.

So my question is, do we have hope? Have we lost? Did we lose already? And if we've lost, what does that mean for our project?

00:50:46 Saidiya

Yeah for me a couple of things come to mind. There's a certain way, there's this polarity of like Afro pessimism, black optimism and for me, they're like are porous membrane they're not poles, they're total porous membrane. Du Bois said something about, you know it is most necessary to have hope in a situation, it is most necessary to be hopeful in a situation that seems utterly hopeless. So I think hope is different from optimism, right? And I

make good this talk by trying to produce other sets of arrangements, other forms of association, other ways to live. I don't in any way take for granted a future, but I don't feel hopeless or that we have already lost.

00:55:03 Jordan D.

I have one quick question to sneak in. One last thing, do you still believe in Baraka's note on poetry?

00:55:11 Saidiya

Oh, say, more. Like what do you mean?

00:55:13 Jordan D.

It was an interview you did a few years ago, where apparently you had interviewed him and what he said, you asked him if the poetry could make social change and he said you needed a gun [laughter].

00:55:22 Saidiya

Oh, oh. And you know what? And I think that Baraka is someone like Frank Wilderson, they say provocative things to inspire thought to like, ah. But, I think Baraka, as his practice would indicate was like absolutely committed to poetry and poetics, and one of the things that's so important for me about poetics it's about making new modalities of thought possible. I mean, I don't really think that differently about the distinction between poetry and theory.

I was certainly shocked, but I don't think that Baraka believed that 100%...

00:56:13 Jordan D.

Alright, that makes sense. Thank you so very much, thank you.

00:56:18 David

We are doing very well on time, so we

condition of fungibility as you say. I feel my efforts to highlight the disparate living conditions for residents within the Robles public housing village and their ability to, despite these circumstances, form commune, resilient practice, maintain exuberance in spirit was successful, but in hindsight I think my project had a couple of faults, the first being that I concluded Robles Village is Zion, which is actually the title of my paper. So not only a cemetery but a place of spiritual importance that we should regard as such. I feel like I fell into the trap of pleading for recognition rather than planning for abolition.

So I think this conclusion stemmed from my interviews that I did with some of the residents and I wanted to help alleviate their suffering like immediately and ended up falling into this trap. And then the second part of my question was, I don't think I sat long enough or lingered in this space of the more, as you say.

There's 382 death certificates of African Americans entered at Zion Cemetery, and outside of their names, date of birth, death, their marital status, and their home address, there's little known about the lives of the deceased there. There was eleven people, African Americans that actually had little pieces articles in the local archives and it was mostly like they had strange or gruesome deaths that occurred that justified newspapers, I guess, covering them. There was one actually prominent minister who was also covered, but that was the only person that was considered of importance buried there in that time.

So I believe imagining some of the strange and missing details within these 11 deaths may have allowed for more compelling discourse on agency within social death that African Americans within Tampa Bay experienced in the 20th century, and then linking that to the social positionality of African American residents in the Robles Housing Project Village today.

So yeah that was kind of not really direct questions, but I wondered if you had some input or how I might be able to rethink this and elaborate on these projects in the future.

01:00:16 Saidiya

Yeah, I mean one, there's a colleague of mine at Columbia, an architect Mable Wilson, who also curated the show Black Architects at MoMA in New York who did that kind of like architectural histories about thinking of the city as a plantation. And I think that thinking about the spatial dynamics is a really, really good way to articulate that long durée. I think that there's something about wanting- I understand that impulse like wanting to rush in and do better. And I think that sometimes what we're called on to do is actually to just sit98 Tf*nd on to do is

teaches at Spellman decided make a community organic farm at the site of my great grandfather's store and is now feeding that community right? She's gotten these funds from a black land trust to expand that project. That's something that's very, it is just like so important. For me, it's so funny, about her doing that actually changes my relationship to Montgomery. For the first time, I think like, oh maybe I have to spend part of my time in Montgomery- like my cousin is doing this really tremendous thing there. And that's created an opening for me to be grounded in community in a way that I'm not because I grew up in New York with my dad's family who's Caribbean. So that's one cousin and I have another cousin in Cambridge, she was a teacher and educator trying to be a progressive inside the public school system and finding it impossible [laughter]. And so she started like a black freedom school and is working with all these other black homeschoolers, having these projects. So when I look, particularly people who are younger than me, I feel like, wow, you all are taking up- you're asking this question and you're building other kinds of institutions, so I feel like whether it's [inaudible], black farming projects, held collectives, I feel like those are the kinds of structures that we need to build that simply not like about a protest politics, a politics of recognition about getting into the street. But how do we create things that are going to help make our lives more sustainable and fuller right now where we are?

01:08:50 Brittany

I actually really, really appreciate your answer. I'm an educator, I'm going back to teach middle school y'all pray for me.

01:09:00 Saidiya

Yeah no, no no and it was funny because with these young cousins, I mean my daughter went to like this, quote unquote, new progressive arts charter school and when I showed them the statement, they're both educators- I was so optimistic- they were like mm-mm [shakes head no], as long as it's trying to be school, there's so much stuff that comes with that. So I think also just like you young educators who are trying to do it differently, who both have a theoretical analysis of the limits of the structure, so you come in with so much knowledge, and you're also not going to tolerate things as usual.

And that gives me a lot of hope.

01:09:38 Brittany

Yeah, yeah, I definitely said that in an interview that this is what I will and will not tolerate [laughter].

01:09:44 Saidiya

Yeah, and my cousins they were clear too, its like okay...

01:09:51 David

Alright, we have about 19 minutes before we need to let Dr. Hartman go so she doesn't miss her ride [laughter]. I know you expressed interest in chatting with Marlon a bit more about his work on land.

So Jade if you could highlight or spotlight Marlon again so they can discuss that would be great.

01:10:17 Marlon

Oh yeah, so you just- like to go into my work pretty much?

So my work, like I said, I'm an artist, a visual artist. I just received my MFA this year. My work focused on the historical relationship between African Americans and land ownership through the lens of my family. My family has owned, more or less, a big plot of land in this small, small town right outside of Jacksonville, Florida. And they've owned it for generations, so I wanted to really uncover all of the nuances that it took for black people to get land and also to keep land. So in my research I went through a lot of documentation, legal documentation in regards to my family and passing down the land and owning the land and even losing the land. I interviewed a lot of older family members. I went through a lot of family archival documents, photos, as well as actual found materials. I did some installation work as well, which allowed me to actually build scenes, and I built some conceptual pieces that really at the heart of it, just told the story of this black family in the South during Jim Crow and what it took for them to survive and keep this little piece of America for future generations.

01:12:23 Saidiya

Yeah, no, that that's powerful. That's powerful.

01:12:35 David

Dr. Serls or Professor Freeman?

with a kind of acute regard and deep and profound understanding of all the tools I have, everything I have is because of what they've done, even when they don't talk about it. Even when they don't talk about it. This same great grandfather, I saw a picture of him In Eyes on the Prize when, like the Klan was surrounding a church in which Dr. King and others had gathered. And after they gathered, black men had gathered and I was like looking through it, I was like what? Is that Papa? I did a freeze frame and I took a photo and I sent it to them and they were like Oh my God Papa was there. That's a story- he never told us that, right? For me, those moments are everything. That's a spark for a story of an average working class, but middle class aspiring black man pullman porter, would never consider himself a radical or even like he never said, "oh I participated in the struggle in Montgomery" but yet he was there outside that church when people needed help. And so those are the moments that I like to attend to and all the people whose names we don't know, who made where we sit possible. So that just feels like really tremendously important to me and I want to spend the rest of my life doing that.

01:17:46 McArthur

Awesome, thank you.

01:17:53 David

Dr. Serls?

01:18:00 Tangela

I actually saw someone in the chat had their hand raised but then they lowered it and so since we're going to have our own time with Dr.

I'm curious what you're interested in telling us with the backdrop of Roe V. Wade being challenged and unique concerns that black women have and how that may- I know you mentioned that Afro pessimism is oftentimes like a permeable wall that goes in and out of you know nihilism and optimism. So I guess again, I don't know if I have a real question, but I really want to hear your thoughts, if that makes sense.

01:20:28 Saidiya

Yes, and I'm trying to.. I think that certainly the piece on unending comes from Hortense Spillers, Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe. And I think that that article is so foundational to now like 3 generations of Black thought and so I think that there are various arguments that build from Spillers. I mean other people have challenged a dimorphic gendered framework as like an imposition of coloniality that's inapplicable to many places in the world, but certainly in terms of understanding black people, and particularly enslaved, that issues of fungibility, plasticity, figurative capacity, maybe more robust descriptive terms than any notion of black life unfolding in accordance with these gendered norms. So I think that even when people, and I would say myself included, deviate from Spillers, it's not like in opposition to Spillers.

One of the things I say in seduction, even as there's a recognition of certain limited forms of violence that may constitute the enslaved as human, it is very interesting that sexual vioJETQs7in wnr t we of ws
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